



Aruba's ONLY English newspaper

## Efforts to restrict transgender health care endure in 2024, with more adults targeted

By A.DeMILLO  
Associated Press

Republican-led state legislatures are considering a new round of bills restricting medical care for transgender youths — and in some cases, adults — returning to the issue the year after a wave of high-profile bills became law and sparked lawsuits. As legislatures begin their work for the year, lawmakers in several states have proposed enacting or strengthening restrictions on puberty-blocking drugs and hormone treatments for minors. Bills to govern the pronouns kids can use at school, which sports teams students can play on, and the bathrooms they can use are back, as well, along with efforts to restrict drag performances and some books and school curriculums.



Protesters gather inside the State Capitol building on Friday, May 19, 2023, in Lincoln, Neb., before lawmakers were scheduled to begin debating a bill that will ban abortions at 12 weeks of pregnancy and also ban gender-affirming care for transgender minors.

Associated Press  
Page 2

Continued on Page 2

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## Efforts to restrict transgender health care endure in 2024, with more adults targeted

Continued from Front

LGBTQ+ advocates say that most of the states inclined to pass bans on gender-affirming care have done so, and that they now expect them to build on those restrictions and expand them to include adults. With legislatures in most states up for election this year, transgender youths and their families worry about again being targeted by conservatives using them as a wedge issue.

They include Mandy Wong, a mother in Santa Barbara, California, who said she's tired of conservative politicians using transgender children as "campaign fuel." While she doesn't expect such a policy to pass in her Democrat-led state, Wong said, her child and his friends feel emotionally drained.

"It was just heartbreaking to tell him ... I don't think this is going away anytime soon," she said. "All the negative attention trans kids, even us as parents, have gotten because of these proposals doesn't seem to be dying down." In Ohio, House Republicans voted Wednesday to override Republican Gov. Mike DeWine's veto of legislation banning all forms of gender-affirming care for minors. The Senate is expected to follow suit this month. Despite his veto, DeWine signed an order banning the rare occurrence of gender-transition surgeries before adulthood. He also proposed rules mandating a care team for children and adults that critics say could severely restrict access for all patients.

In South Carolina, one of the few Southern states without a ban on gender-affirming care for minors, a House committee voted Wednesday to send a ban to the House floor. The bill, sponsored by



Missouri state Sen. Mike Moon speaks to a reporter, Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024, in his state Capitol office in Jefferson City, Mo.

the state's Republican House speaker, would also prevent Medicaid from covering such treatments for anyone under age 26. And last week in New Hampshire, the House voted to ban gender-transition surgeries for minors.

At least 22 states have enacted bans on gender-affirming care for children, with most of them approved in the past year. Those who support the bans say they want to protect children and have concerns about the treatments themselves. Major medical groups, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, oppose the bans and have endorsed such care, saying it's safe when administered properly.

Last year's limits included a Florida law that has made it nearly impossible for many transgender adults in the state to receive gender-affirming care. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has promoted that ban as one of his accomplishments as he seeks the Republican

presidential nomination. "They'll stop at nothing, so we don't know what exactly to anticipate (in 2024)," said Katy Erker-Lynch, executive director of PROMO, an advocacy group in Missouri, where lawmakers have proposed more than 20 bills targeting LGBTQ+ people.

Bills filed in Missouri include efforts to remove two provisions that were key in overcoming a Democratic filibuster to that state's ban on gender-affirming care for youths. The new Missouri Freedom Caucus is prioritizing a bill that would make the ban on gender-affirming care for minors permanent, removing a provision that allows it to expire in 2027. Legislation would also remove a clause that allows minors who began the care before the law went into effect to continue with it.

Republican state Sen. Mike Moon, who is sponsoring bills both to repeal the expiration date on the medical restrictions and to require schools to tell parents if a student wants

to go by a name or pronoun other than the one the parent used to register the child for school, compared transgender medical restrictions for minors to age thresholds in laws for smoking, drinking and driving.

"Children, especially younger children, don't make good decisions, and they're not certain exactly what reality is sometimes," Moon said.

LGBTQ+ activists call laws that require schools to tell parents about a student's desire to change names or pronouns "forced outing," saying schools might be the only safe place for a transgender or nonbinary student to express their gender identify. Missouri's large number of filed bills has drawn attention from activists, but Republican legislative leaders say they don't think there's much of an appetite for revisiting the restrictions and don't want to prioritize them.

"We passed what I thought was a strong and fairly broad bill last year," said Missouri

Senate President Pro Tem Caleb Rowden, referring to the medical ban.

In Oklahoma, at least two bills remain active from last year that target gender-affirming care for adults. One proposal would prohibit insurance coverage for the procedures for adults, while another would prohibit public funds from going to any entity that provides such care.

Both measures stalled in the Republican-controlled Legislature last year but could be reconsidered during the legislative session starting in February.

The rules proposed in Ohio by DeWine last week place new limits on adults that advocates say would make treatment difficult, if not impossible, for some people. They include mandating a team for individuals that would consist of at least an endocrinologist, a bioethicist and a psychiatrist. The rules also would require departments to collect data submitted by medical providers on gender dysphoria and subsequent treatment.

Several bills have been filed in Florida, including a measure to require employees at state agencies or at any entity that receives state funding to use the pronouns consistent with their assigned sex at birth. Legislation introduced Wednesday in West Virginia would ban gender-affirming care up to age 21 and prohibit mental health professionals from supporting what lawmakers call a transgender patient's "delusion" about their gender identity.

In California, which has offered refuge to transgender youths and their families from states with medical bans, conservatives are mounting a longshot effort to put a measure on next year's ballot targeting the rights of transgender minors. □

Associated Press



# Donald Trump defies judge, gives courtroom speech on tense final day of New York civil fraud trial

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ

Associated Press

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Barred from giving a formal closing argument, Donald Trump still seized an opportunity to speak in court at the conclusion of his New York civil fraud trial Thursday, unleashing a barrage of attacks in a six-minute diatribe before being cut off by the judge.

Trump spoke as the judge was trying to find out if the former president would follow rules requiring him to keep his remarks focused on matters related to the trial. Asked whether he would comply with the guidelines, Trump defied the judge and simply launched into his speech.

"We have a situation where I am an innocent man," Trump protested. "I'm being persecuted by someone running for office and I think you have to go outside the bounds."

Judge Arthur Engoron — who earlier denied Trump's extraordinary request to give his own closing statement — let him continue almost uninterrupted for what amounted to a brief personal summation, then cut him off for a scheduled lunch break.

Trump's in-court remarks, which were not televised, ensured a tumultuous final day for a trial over allegations that he habitually exaggerated his wealth on financial statements he provided to banks, insurance companies and others.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat, sued Trump in 2022 under a state law that gives her broad power to investigate allegations of persistent fraud in business dealings. She wants the judge to impose \$370 million in penalties and forbid him from doing business in New York.

Adding to the day's tension, the exchanges took place hours after authorities responded to a bomb threat at the judge's house in New York City's suburbs. The scare didn't delay the start of court proceedings.



Former President Donald Trump sits in the courtroom before the start of closing arguments in his civil business fraud trial at New York Supreme Court, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2024, in New York.

Associated Press

Trump, the leading contender for the Republican presidential nomination, has disparaged Engoron throughout the trial, accusing him in a social media post Wednesday night of working closely with James. On Wednesday, Engoron had rejected an unusual plan by Trump to deliver his own closing remarks in the courtroom, in addition to summations from his legal team. The sticking point was that Trump's lawyers would not agree to the judge's demand that he stick to "relevant" matters and not try to introduce new evidence or make a campaign speech.

After two of Trump's lawyers had delivered traditional closing arguments Thursday, one of them, Christopher Kise, asked the judge again whether Trump could speak. Engoron asked Trump whether he would abide by the guidelines. Trump then launched into his remarks.

"This is a fraud on me. What's happened here, sir, is a fraud on me," Trump said. He later accused the judge of not listening to him. "I know this is boring to you."

"Control your client," Engoron warned Kise.

Engoron then told Trump he had a minute left, let

him speak a little more, and then adjourned.

In the afternoon, a lawyer for New York state said in his closing remarks that Trump and his "cash poor" company couldn't have completed various development projects without loans and cash flow from interest savings enabled by spurious financial statements.

"Fraud was central to the operation of the Trump Organization's business," said the attorney, Kevin Wallace. He said that Trump and the other defendants intentionally put false information in the company's financial statements.

Trump skipped the afternoon court session in favor of a news conference that served as counter programming to the state's closing argument. He peppered his remarks at a lower Manhattan office building he owns — and could lose control of as a result of the trial — with barbs about President Joe Biden and a writer who accused him of rape, E. Jean Carroll.

The day began with police on Long Island checking out the threat at Engoron's Long Island home. At 5:30 a.m. Nassau County police said they responded to a "swatting incident" at the house in Great Neck. Noth-

ing amiss was found at the location, officials said.

Taking the bench a few minutes late, Engoron made no mention of the incident.

The false report came days after a fake emergency call reporting a shooting at the home of the judge in Trump's Washington, D.C. criminal case. The incidents are among a recent spate of similar false reports at the homes of public officials.

Engoron decided some of the key issues before testimony began. In a pretrial ruling, he found that Trump had committed years of fraud by lying about his riches on financial statements with tricks like claiming his Trump Tower penthouse was nearly three times its actual size.

The trial involves six undecided claims, including allegations of conspiracy, insurance fraud and falsifying business records. Trump's company and two of his sons, Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr., are also defendants. Eric Trump was also in court for closing arguments.

During his argument, Kise contended Trump did nothing wrong and didn't mislead anyone about his wealth. He said his client "should get a medal" for his business acumen instead

of punishment he deemed the "corporate death penalty."

"This entire case is a manufactured claim to pursue a political agenda," Kise said. Since the trial began Oct. 2, Trump has gone to court nine times to observe, testify and complain to TV cameras about the case.

He clashed with Engoron and state lawyers during 3½ hours on the witness stand in November and remains under a limited gag order after making a disparaging and false social media post about the judge's law clerk. Thursday's arguments were part of a busy legal and political stretch for Trump.

On Tuesday, he was in court in Washington, D.C., to watch appeals court arguments over whether he is immune from prosecution on charges that he plotted to overturn the 2020 election — one of four criminal cases against him. Trump has pleaded not guilty. On Monday, the presidential primary season kicks off with the Iowa caucus.

State lawyers say that by making himself seem richer, Trump qualified for better loan terms from banks, saving him at least \$168 million. Kise acknowledged that some holdings may have been listed "higher by immaterial" amounts, but he added "there's plenty of assets that were undervalued by substantial sums."

Engoron said he is deciding the case because neither side asked for a jury and state law doesn't allow for juries for this type of lawsuit. He said he hopes to have a decision by the end of the month.

Last month, in a ruling denying a defense bid for an early verdict, the judge signaled he's inclined to find Trump and his co-defendants liable on at least some claims.

"Valuations, as elucidated ad nauseum in this trial, can be based on different criteria analyzed in different ways," Engoron wrote in the Dec. 18 ruling. "But a lie is still a lie." □



# The U.S. failed to track more than \$1 billion in military gear given Ukraine, Pentagon watchdog says

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER

Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — Shortfalls in required monitoring by American officials mean the U.S. cannot track more than \$1 billion in weapons and military equipment provided to Ukraine to fight invading Russian forces, according to a Pentagon audit released Thursday.

The findings mean that 59% of \$1.7 billion in defense gear that the U.S. has provided Ukraine and was directed to guard against misuse or theft remained "delinquent," the report by the Defense Department's office of the inspector-general, the watchdog body for the Pentagon, said.

While Biden administration officials stressed Thursday that there was no evidence the weapons had been stolen, the audit undermines two years of lavish assurances from the administration that rigorous monitoring would keep U.S. military aid given to Ukraine from being misused. That's despite the country's long-standing reputation for corruption.

"There remains no credible evidence of illicit diversion of U.S.-provided advanced conventional weapons from Ukraine," Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder, a Pentagon



Pentagon spokesman Air Force Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder speaks during a briefing at the Pentagon in Washington, Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2024.

spokesman, told reporters. Citing what he said was Russian disinformation to the contrary, Ryder added, "The fact is, we observed the Ukrainians employing these capabilities on the battlefield. We're seeing them use them effectively." President Joe Biden is already struggling to win congressional approval for more U.S. military and financial aid to Ukrainian government forces, which are struggling to drive out Russian forces that pushed deeper into the country in

February 2022. The audit findings are likely to make Biden's task even harder. House Republican opposition for months has stalled Biden's request to Congress for \$105 billion more for Ukraine, Israel and other national security objectives. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Thursday that there was no funding left for additional military aid packages to Ukraine. The U.S. has provided tens of billions of dollars in military aid to Ukraine, includ-

ing big systems such as air defense. The end-use monitoring was required for gear that had sensitive technology and was smaller, making it more vulnerable to arms trafficking. The Pentagon inspector general's report said that the Defense Department had failed to maintain an accurate serial-number inventory of those defense articles for Ukraine as required. Reasons for the shortfall in monitoring included limited staffing; the fact that

procedures for carrying out end-use monitoring in a war zone weren't put in place until December 2022; restrictions on movement for monitors within Ukraine; and a lack of internal controls on inventory, the report said.

While the U.S. had improved monitoring since the first year of the war, "significant personnel limitations and accountability challenges remain," auditors said; full accounting of the gear was impossible as long as those shortfalls remained, they said.

Kirby said administration officials "has for many months now been interested in improving accountability over the end use of material that is provided to Ukraine."

The audit didn't attempt to determine whether any of the assistance had been diverted. It noted the Defense Department inspector-general's office now had people stationed in Ukraine, and that its criminal investigators were still looking into allegations of criminal misuse of the security assistance.

Defense Department officials told auditors they expected to have systems for improved oversight in place this year and next. □

Associated Press

# FCC chair asks automakers about plans to stop abusers from using car electronics to stalk partners



Federal Communications Commission Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel speaks from the South Court Auditorium on the White House complex in Washington, Monday, Feb. 14, 2022.

Associated Press

**DETROIT (AP)** — The top U.S. telecommunications regu-

lator is asking automakers how they plan to protect people from being stalked or harassed by partners who have access to vehicle location and other data.

In a letter sent Thursday to nine large automakers, Federal Communications Commission Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel asks for details about connected car systems and plans to support people who have been harassed by domestic abusers. "No survivor of domestic violence and abuse should have to choose between giving up their car and allowing themselves to be stalked and

harmed by those who can access its data and connectivity," she said in a statement. Nearly all new vehicles have convenience features that use telecommunications to find cars in parking lots, start the engine remotely, and even connect with emergency responders, Rosenworcel's letter said.

"These features rely on wireless connectivity and location data that in the wrong hands can be used to harm partners in abusive relationships," she wrote.

The letter asks automakers for details about their connected services and whether they

have policies in place to remove access to connected apps and other features if a request is made by someone who is being abused. Rosenworcel asks if the companies remove access even from someone whose name is on the vehicle's title.

Letters were sent to top executives at General Motors, Ford, Honda, Hyundai, Mercedes-Benz, Nissan, Stellantis, Tesla and Toyota. Similar letters also went to wireless voice providers, the commission said.

Messages were left Thursday seeking comment from the automakers. □



# U.S. and allies accuse Russia of using North Korean missiles against Ukraine

By EDITH M. LEDERER

Associated Press

**UNITED NATIONS (AP)** — The United States, Ukraine and six allies accused Russia on Wednesday of using North Korean ballistic missiles and launchers in a series of devastating aerial attacks against Ukraine, in violation of U.N. sanctions.

Their joint statement, issued ahead of a Security Council meeting on Ukraine, cited the use of North Korean weapons during waves of strikes on Dec. 30, Jan. 2 and Jan. 6 and said the violations increase suffering of the Ukrainian people, "support Russia's brutal war of aggression, and undermine the global nonproliferation regime."

The eight countries also including France, the United Kingdom, Japan, Malta, South Korea and Slovenia accused Russia of exploiting its position as a veto-wielding permanent member of the council and warned that "each violation makes the world a much more dangerous



**FILE** - In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, a crater of an explosion is seen next to the private building destroyed after a Russian missile attack in Novomoskovsk, near Kryvyi Rih, Ukraine, Monday, Jan. 8, 2024. Russia's recent escalation of missile and drone attacks is stretching Ukraine's air defense resources, a Ukrainian air force official said Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2024, leaving the country vulnerable in the 22-month war unless it can secure further weapons supplies. (Ukrainian Emergency Service via AP, File)

place."

At the council meeting, Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said the information came from U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby, but he said representatives

of the Ukrainian air force "specifically said that Kyiv did not have any evidence of this fact."

Nebenzia accused Ukraine of using American and European weapons "to hit Christmas markets, resi-

dential buildings, women, the elderly and children" in the Russian city of Belgorod near the Ukrainian border and elsewhere.

U.N. political chief Rosemary DiCarlo told the council that Ukraine has suffered

some of the worst attacks since Russia's February 2022 invasion in recent weeks, with 69% of civilian casualties in the frontline regions of Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kher-son and Zaporizhzhia.

Over the recent holiday period, she said, "Russian missiles and drones targeted numerous locations across the country," including the capital Kyiv and the western city of Lviv.

Between Dec. 29 and Jan. 2, the U.N. humanitarian office recorded 519 civilian casualties, DiCarlo said: 98 people killed and 423 injured. That includes 58 civilians killed and 158 injured on Dec. 29 in Russian drone and missile strikes across the country, "the highest number of civilian casualties in a single day in all of 2023," she said.

The following day, at least 24 civilians were reportedly killed and more than 100 others injured in strikes on Belgorod attributed to Ukraine, she said. Russia's Nebenzia said a Christmas market was hit. □

# Magnitude 6.4 earthquake shakes parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan but no damage is reported

By MUNIR AHMED

Associated Press

**ISLAMABAD (AP)** — A magnitude 6.4 earthquake shook parts of Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan on Thursday, sending panicked residents fleeing from their homes and offices and frightening people in remote villages, Pakistani officials and the U.S. Geological Survey said.

The epicenter of the quake was in the Hindu Kush mountain range in Afghanistan, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department. It was the third major earthquake to strike Afghanistan in three months.

It was located 45 kilometers (28 miles) from Jurm village in northeastern Afghanistan at a depth of 206 kilometers (128 miles), the USGS said.

There were no immediate reports of damage in either country.

It was felt in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, and in the major cities of Lahore, Peshawar and Muzaffarabad in the Pakistan-administered portion of the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, which is divided between Pakistan and India and claimed by both in its entirety.

Sahiba Bibi, a woman who lives on the outskirts of Islamabad, said she was preparing for prayers when she suddenly felt the ground shaking. "We quickly came out of our home and we saw some other people also standing outside their houses," she said.

Residents in the northwestern city of Peshawar also said they went out of their

homes and offices after feeling the earthquake.

"I knew that it should not be less than magnitude 6 when I felt the earthquake as we have felt strong earthquakes in the past," said Mohammad Khan, 65, in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan.

Bilal Faizi, a spokesperson for Pakistan's emergency services in the northwest, said police and rescue officials were ordered to report any damage.

"So far, there has been no reported damage from the earthquake, though the earthquake was so strong that it terrified many people," he said.

Authorities in Pakistan-administered Kashmir said the earthquake caused no

damage there.

Pakistan and the region, which sit along an active continental plate boundary, are often hit by earthquakes.

The quake was also felt in the Afghan capital, Kabul, and in provinces in the east

and northeast.

The International Rescue Committee said it was "deeply fearful" about what the earthquake meant for Afghans and the humanitarian response in the country. □



**People stand outside their offices building after an earthquake was felt in Islamabad, Pakistan, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2024.**

Associated Press



## Tons of trash clogs a river in Bosnia. It's a seasonal problem that activists want an end to

By **ELDAR EMRIC**  
Associated Press

**VISEGRAD, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP)** — With predictable seasonality, tons of garbage floats down a river at least twice a year and ends up near the eastern Bosnian town of Visegrad behind a barrier installed by a local hydroelectric plant.

An environmental activist watched as workers removed trash from the river. "New year, new problems or rather old problems with new garbage floating our way," Dejan Furtula of the environmental group Eko Centar Visegrad said Wednesday.

Garbage from unauthorized waste dumps dotting the Western Balkans is carried year-round by the Drina River and its tributaries in Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro toward Visegrad, and further on to the Danube River, into which the Drina eventually flows.

But during the wet weather of winter and early spring the waterways in the region swell and sweep up such a huge amount of trash from dozens of illegal landfills along their banks that it can't escape the hold of



**A crane moves as it collects waste floating in the Drina river near Visegrad, Bosnia, Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2024.**

the river fencing installed by the Bosnian hydroelectric plant a few kilometers upstream from its dam near Visegrad.

As the result, at least twice a year and for a few weeks, the fencing turns into the outer edge of a floating accumulation of plastic bottles, rusty barrels, used tires, household appliances, driftwood, dead animals and other waste, putting into plain sight the

failure of regional authorities to adopt and enforce adequate environmental quality standards.

"Once again (since late December), between five and six thousand cubic meters of mixed waste amassed here and the hydroelectric plant workers have been clearing it away," Furtula said. "Last year, the clearing activities lasted for 11 months, which is to say that the waste

keeps coming throughout the year."

The Drina River runs 346 kilometers (215 miles) from the mountains of northwestern Montenegro through Serbia and Bosnia. The Drina and some of its tributaries are known for their emerald color and breathtaking scenery, and a section along the border between Bosnia and Serbia in particular is popular with river rafters.

However, the regular, headline-grabbing reemergence of the floating waste near Visegrad makes marketing the town as an outdoor tourism destination a very difficult job.

"The ghastly sight that greets Visegrad visitors at the entrance to the town is a problem that we cannot solve," said Olivera Todorovic from the Visegrad Tourism Board.

"Judging by what we hear from tourists, that ugly and sometimes unpleasantly smelling site discourages many visitors from coming to Visegrad," she added.

Furtula agreed, but argued that problem was much deeper. Each year, an estimated 10,000 cubic meters of waste is removed from the section of the Drina near Visegrad and taken to the city's municipal landfill to be burned. The smoke and leachate from the "always burning" landfill are an obvious health hazard, Furtula said. In March, Eko Centar Visegrad will start taking water samples from the Drina and testing them for pollutants at several locations, including in the vicinity of the city's municipal landfill. □

Associated Press

## Violence rattles Ecuador as a nightclub arson kills 2 and a bomb scare sparks an evacuation

**QUITO, Ecuador (AP)** — A bomb threat sent an anti-explosives unit scrambling into a bustling area of Ecuador's tense capital Thursday while authorities in a western city responded to a nightclub arson that killed two people, as the South American country staggers under a spike in violence. Police in the capital, Quito, said they were forced to evacuate people from the area surrounding the Playón de la Marín bus station when they were alerted about a backpack with an alleged explosive placed in a garbage can. The backpack turned out to not have any explosives,

authorities said, but it followed five similar incidents in the capital Wednesday

with actual explosives. Explosives packed in two vehicles, at a pedestrian

bridge and near a prison, caused minor damage but no deaths or injuries.

Meanwhile, authorities told reporters that unknown suspects set fire to a nightclub in the Amazon city of Coca, which killed at least two people and injured nine others. The blaze also spread to 11 nearby stores, officials said. The investigation is ongoing.

Ecuador is the grips of a crime wave blamed on drug trafficking gangs, and President Daniel Noboa declared an emergency and a virtual war on the gangs earlier in the week. Ecuadoreans worry that violence will only escalate

in a country where a presidential candidate was assassinated last year.

Gang members in prisons throughout the country have taken corrections personnel hostage since Sunday, when the leader of one of the country's most powerful drug gangs vanished from prison.

On Thursday, inmates managed to increase to 178 the number of corrections personnel they are holding hostage, according to the prisons agency. A union that represents prison employees has asked officials to guarantee the "physical and psychological integrity" of the hostages. □



**Police carry out a controlled explosion of a suspicious vehicle parked a block from El Inca prison, in Quito, Ecuador, Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2024.**

Associated Press



# The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba recognizes their five stars of the year

PALM BEACH, ARUBA, 28 di December, 2023 – Recently, The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba celebrated their Annual 'Five Star' Event in order to recognize their Ladies and Gentlemen.

Amidst the stars of the Ritz-Carlton, Aruba, there shines a constellation of honor, where the brightest stars are lauded for their excellent contributions. With great honor, we unveil the names of 50 such radiant beings, whose stellar efforts have strengthened The Ritz-Carlton culture.

Join us as we celebrate their achievements:



**TakeCare Champion:**

Elba Fajardo & Veronica Ruiz

**Employee Promise**

Champion: Imelij Willems, Eric Abdul, Desirée Bikker, Giovanna Luidens, Gianno Arends, Rachele Oduber, Zulaika Croes, & David Coster

**Rising Star:**

Veronica Ruiz, Stephanie Arango, Yvonne Huen, Sherrelies Leest, Kimberly Peña, Reena Tangco, Kiana Geerman, & Jeaniré Rampart

**WOW Champion:**

Lakshan Weerasinghe, Kimberly Maduro, Jose Deluque, Eliceny Lascarro, & Gregory Boekhoudt



**Product & Service Excellence:**

Dwight Laclé, Yannick Benjamin, Marc-Anthony Croes, Djurick Marin, Luis Suarez, Kiana Geerman, Genesis Matos, Andres Diaz, Marbel Ospino, Aracely Clase, Alex Toro, Vianny Polanco, Ruth Torres, & Shaquile Mezas

**Creative Innovation:**

Joanna Maya, Djalma Geerman, Yanique Dacosta, & Ivan Botina

**Financial Excellence:**

Eric Abdul, Yvonne Huen, & Jessica Rovers

**The Mayra Macaraig Sales Intensity:**

Rino Kuiperi, Justine Cremony, Susana Wu, Susana De La Oliva, & Aisling Seberry.



**Leaders of the Year 2023:**  
David Coster & Djurick Marin

**Supervisor of the Year 2023:**  
Ruth Chen

**Five Stars of the Year 2023:**  
Carlos de la Cruz, Vivina Strachan, Soraydia Brokke, Dwayne Arends, & Vaya Hurkmans

**Making a difference award:**  
Reshma Paryani, Luis Franken, Altagracia Lampe, & Elba Fajardo

## Why You Should Not Miss Aruba's Free City Center Street Car Tour

ORANJESTAD - Aruba's City Center Street Car - or as we call it in Dutch; "Tram van Oranjestad" - is a single track tram line in Oranjestad, the capital city of Aruba. It was inaugurated on 22 December 2012, being the first and so far the only passenger rail service on Aruba and the rest of the Dutch Caribbean. There are two trolleys, a single-deck one with 42 seats and a double-decker with 64 seats. The line was inspired by the popular battery-powered streetcar operation at the Grove in Los Angeles, USA. Aruba's streetcars are powered by hydrogen fuel cells, which are charged by the island's year-round trade winds.



Caya Betico Croes, mostly referred to as our "main street" has been developed into a pollution-free pedestrian mall. The double-decker offers you a 360 degree view of the down town area with a picture perfect scenery of the island's clear blue skies. Who would not enjoy a ride on this beautiful and naturally air-conditioned vehicle? The tour consists of a total of 9 stops approximately 200 meters apart from each other; all stops are clearly marked. The tram will bring you close to different museums, historical plazas, monuments, the Protestant church, Aruba's high-end

mall, retail shops, and a variety of local and international cuisine restaurants. The "I love Aruba" trademark also belongs to that list. The third stop on the route is close to a 5-minute walk to the famous Renaissance Marina showcasing luxurious yachts and Aruba's blue waters.

The "Tram van Oranjestad" starts from a balloon loop near the Port of Call and serves the downtown area and ends at Plaza Nicky. The first ride starts at 10:00 am sharp with intervals of 25minutes. The last trolley departs from the cruise port at 5:00pm. Don't miss this tour of the beautiful Aruba's City Center- it is free for all! □

## Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back or still enjoying your vacation?... we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

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## Exploring the Mainstreet of San Nicolas

**SAN NICOLAS— At Just 11 miles southeast from Oranjestad you will enter the city San Nicolas, also known as Sunrise City or Chocolate City. A city that is rich in authentic culture and island charm. San Nicolas is Aruba's second largest city and was once a bustling company town dominated by the oil industry since the early 1930's.**

Over the course of four decades, its demographics had changed immensely due to a stream of Afro-Caribbean and South American workers who came to fill the jobs in the oil refinery between the 1920's until the 1960's. To this day traces of the multicultural influences in culinary offerings and customs, housing and population are clearly visible in San Nicolas - more than anywhere else on the island.

### Flow of history

if you are looking for history San Nicolas has it. Here you will find three amazing museums, The Museum of Industry, the Community

Museum and the Carnival Euphoria, all within walking distance from one another. The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history which began in the 19th century. Here you will learn about gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and the tourism industries which made San Nicolas once a bustling business center. Experience the touching stories of those who were part of this history.

Nicolaas Store built in 1940 and renovated in 2014 is the home of the Community Museum. The collection is remarkable and spans millennia. Ancient fossils stand next to tableaus of an authentically recreated colonial kitchen and bedroom and 19th-century barber-shop, just to name a few of the items of old-time Aruba that has been preserved. A collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance can be found here for the purpose of education or enjoyment.

Carnival Euphoria is show-

casings Aruba's Carnival. See how are Carnival has developed over the past 65 years.

### The new San Nicolas

In the shadow of the refinery, an art capital is quietly beginning to grow. This is the new San Nicolas, a place that is starting to become a magnet for all that is young, cool and hip in Aruba. Indeed, San Nicolas has all of the ingredients of an emerging cultural hub — varied history, interesting architecture, and, perhaps most importantly, an urban layout that makes it walkable. As you walk around, the streets are silent but the walls are loud, filled with bright, colorful murals painted by a collection of artists from around the world. Thanks to the efforts of various art organizations in Aruba, such as Art Rules Aruba and Aruba Art Fair, San Nicolas has had quite the aesthetic makeover with regards to vibrant street art. Each year more and more stunning murals are replacing broken down buildings with colorful art



pieces that keep brightening up SunriseCity.

### Must See, Do, Buy & Eat

A little bit of everything can be found in the main street. Stores selling shoes, clothing, jewelry you name it. Arts & crafts by Cosecha store & Creative Center, a design store in which you can immerse yourself in discovering genuine and lo-

cally made arts and crafts which reflect the diversification of the Aruban craft heritage and the artistic supply of artisans. Don't miss out on trying the exquisite food offered by the cafes and restaurants or just enjoy a peaceful walk admiring the murals, mosaic benches and all the history San Nicolas has to offer. □

## Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

**(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic—but important—information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.**

### Emergency services

Even though most people don't even want to think about having to contact emergency services—especially not while on their vacation, it is still important to know what number to dial in case of the unlikely event of an accident or severe incident.

Police: 100  
Police Tipline: 11141  
Ambulance: 911  
Fire Dept: 115  
Oranjestad: HOH hospital: +297-527-4000  
San Nicolas: ImSan: +297-527-8833

### Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

### Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

### Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

### Taxis

Prices for taxi fair are set by the Department of Public Traffic and are based on destination rather than mileage. Most taxis can take up to five passengers, but this may vary depending on the vehicle. Taxis are pretty much always available and you can ever hire one for \$45 an hour.

### Safety

Aruba is one of the safest islands in the Caribbean, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe. □



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**Aruba's Nature is to be Cherished**

**ST. CRUZ** — The national park Arikok comprises almost 18 % of the island. Its rugged terrain, desert-like hills filled with tall cacti, breathtaking coastline and protected local flora and fauna welcome you to be explored. There is numerous wildlife to discover like for example the sea turtle who lays his eggs on the park's beaches. There are more places on the island that are a preserved area like the Bubali Plas which is a bird sanctuary.

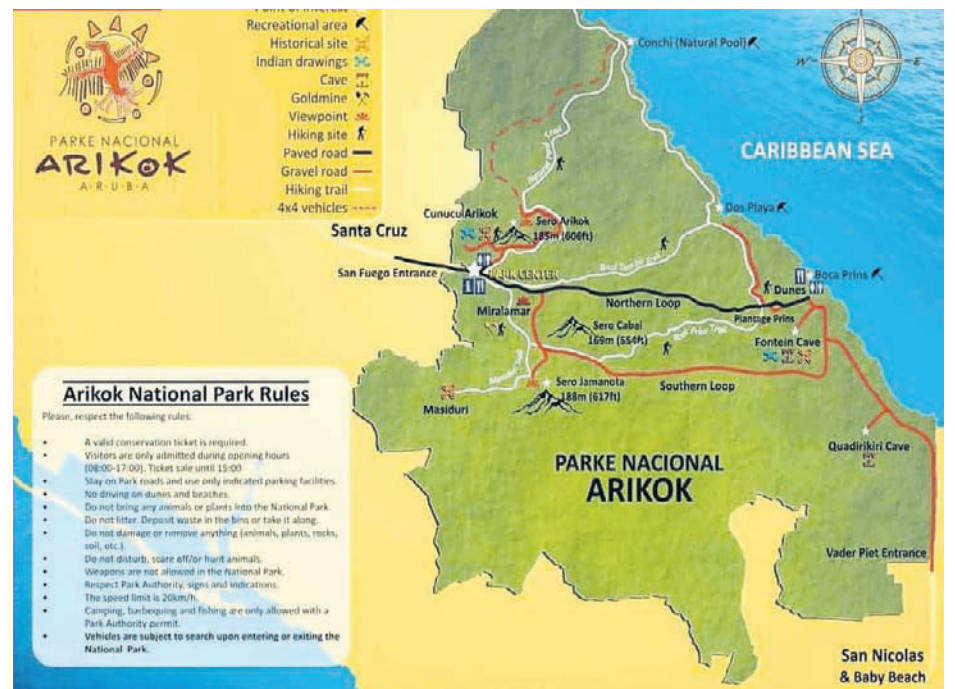
The national park Arikok takes you on a memorable journey of the islands past offering unique geological, cultural and historical sites. These can all be enjoyed and explored either on your own or during guided tours. A wide variety of educational and informative programs and fun activities is available.

Did you know that four of the in total seven species of sea turtle lay their eggs on Aruba's beaches? In the national park,

a Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) keeps a strict eye on a very special event taking place below on the beach: a majestic Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) heads back to sea after laying her eggs, while another nest laid 2 months ago by the same female hatches. A very rare occurrence of daytime nesting and hatching. Sea turtles prefer nesting in the cool and dark hours of the night. And hatchlings usually wait for the cue of cooling surface sand before emerging.

**Bubali Magic**

This beautiful close-up image of the pink bird is courtesy of Michiel Oversteegen of the Aruba Birdlife Conservation. This important foundation showcases and builds awareness of Aruba's birds and other native flora and fauna. You may have seen a 'pink cloud' lately at the Bubali or Spanish Lagoon Wetlands areas? It's most likely to be Roseate Spoonbills (*Ajaia ajaja*) or 'Chucharon Cora' as they are known in Papiamentu. This unusual



looking bird forages in shallow muddy water while sweeping its flattened bill from side to side to catch small fish, crustaceans and other aquatic invertebrates. The Roseate Spoonbill remains an uncommon sight as they are vulnerable to degradation of feeding and nesting habitats (Wetlands). (Source: arikok national park)

this and get an idea of our entire island. Lately there is a discussion going on about the effect certain activities have on our nature, for example the ATV vehicles cause a lot of dust, noise and leave tire tracks. Animals live in these areas where the vehicles run, often with high speed and with detrimental consequences to flora and fauna. Motorized vehicles are forbidden to drive on the sand dunes in the Northern part of the island and all beaches in Aruba are forbidden for any motorized vehicle. Treasure our island to enjoy it like you do: as a tropical and natural paradise. We truly appreciate it! □





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## Episode XC - 90 Material earth, native clay



**ORANJESTAD — Imagine tracing cultural and social transformation through works of clay. Connecting us with our origins through its main element, the earth, who has the millennial age of the planet and gives it its name.**

Working with clay is a passion and profession taught from generation to generation that releases a feeling through which cultures and artisans expressed themselves. If we allow children to interact with the clay, we promote their creativity and development, since when modeling creations with their own hands, they develop sensory perception.

The act of shaping the mixture is almost instinctive and comes naturally. It is an impulse that helps develop fine motor skills and leads us to discover how a little flexible material can

take the shape that our ingenuity dictates. That naturalness of molding dates back forever because the clay bowl is like the brother of the stone ax, both being the first utensils that humanity introduced to its daily life during the Neolithic period.

There is a great legacy of ancient cities, monuments, ceremonial, musical, funerary and home-use objects made in clay, which protected a great part of the customs and worldview of our ancestors.

There is a current trend in which many people are now reconnecting with ancestral trades such as pottery, weaving, cooking, etc. because through them they achieve a relaxing moment. The dedication and concentration that manual work requires helps organize ideas and even clarify thoughts and feel-

discover creativity, decide what to do as well as use the clay to mold emotions of fear or anger.

Human beings are molded and written on like clay tablets looking all the same however none are equal to each other. Manual work (weaving, wood carving, embroidery, pottery) gives us the opportunity to spend time intensely concentrating on what we forge with our hands. At Etnia Nativa, we think that trades should be considered active meditations par excellence. Working with clay we interact with four elements: earth, wind, fire and water. The earth gives us its matter that the water molds and

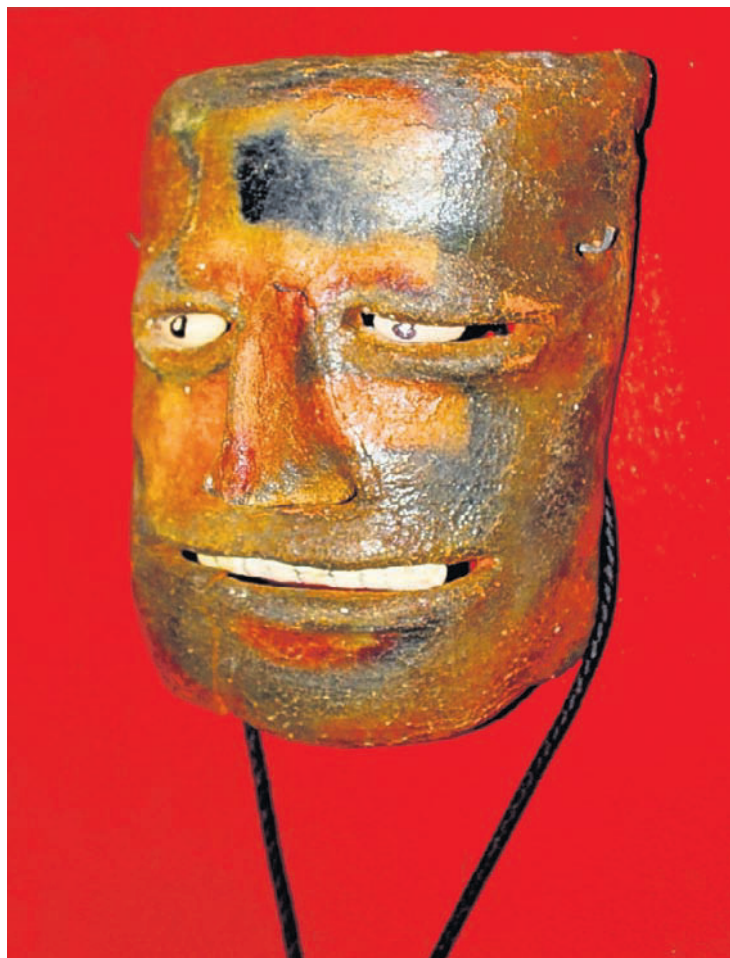


the air purifies it to deliver it to the fire that crystallizes it in to ceramic.

Clay works reflect our energy. Every shape and detail printed on what we create says something about who we are. Working with clay is a work of self-knowledge where creativity arises through emotion and fluency. Etnia Nativa treats raw clay in the native traditional way. We identify the best material by hunting for raw clay. For this we distinguish high quality clay from the rest of the earth. Then adding water we purify the material thus contributing to the cleaning process. During this stage the clay is purified and detoxified, dehydrating and thus we begin to mold our forms.

Having on hand tools necessary for working with clay such as wooden sticks, cutters, brushes are useful to achieve attractive results, without forgetting the ceramic lathe.

To get grounded and really experience islands origins and its cultural history, we believe Etnia Nativa stands alone by carrying all under one roof, educating the curious and entertaining the adventurous traveler. Mail us at [etnianativa03@gmail.com](mailto:etnianativa03@gmail.com) and confirm your participation. Our facilities and activities take place close to high rise hotels. □



**Article by: Etnia Nativa**

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**Etnia Nativa is close to the high rise hotels**





# Aruba: the legend behind its name

**(Oranjestad)—Most folkloric tales and legends in Aruba revolve around our indigenous ancestors, who came from mainland Venezuela, and discovered the island and made it into their new home. This particular legend tells the story of the birth of the Aruba name.**

The legend follows the life of Arua, an indigenous Cacique originally from Aroa in the Falcon state in Venezuela in the year 50 AD. Arua had a son around the year 70 AD with his wife Shira, who they named Corobori. When Corobori was old enough, he joined his father on the usual boat trip to the islands of Curacao and Bonaire to gather salt.

On their way back to Mainland Venezuela, they were caught up in a heavy rain storm—a side effect from a passing, but far away, hurricane. Of course, because of the lack of motors and sail, their boat was left in the mercy of the heavy winds. After a while, the storm started to pass, and the clouds began to clear up. Finally able to see around them, the Cacique spotted land approximately an hour away. So, they started to row in that direction until they reached the coast.

Once they arrived on what they thought was Venezuela, they decided to stay the night and fix their kayak. The next morning, the Cacique ordered his son and a few warriors to go find any sign of population in the area: "Corobori," Arua said. "Don't come back without news. It's in your hands how long we stay here till we find our family. So, if you need to take a week to gather information, we will wait for you."

"Don't worry," Corobori replied. "As soon as we have any information, we will let you know." Armed with arrows and spears, backpacks filled with food and water containers, they set off. They climbed several small hills, but no sign of a village. They crossed different dry riverbeds, but no sign of anything. When the sun finally descended, they found themselves near a fairly tall hill and decided to climb it for a better view of a village. This hill was called Pan Dushi or Orcuyo, which today we call Hooiberg.

The next morning, they could clearly see that they have landed on an island, but an unfamiliar one at that. When Corobori went back to where his father was waiting, he told him the news: "Father Arua, you have just discovered an island, but it is not Curacao or Bonaire. Far in the south, we saw the big mountains of our homeland Venezuela, which we could have never seen on the other island. This leads us to believe we are on a new island. But that's not all. When the sun came up, we saw in the distance a glowing plain, which we think may be salt."

The Cacique was pleased to hear of his son's findings. He decided to stay a couple days on the newly-discovered island in search for salt. The next morning they ascended Hooiberg again and stayed to see if they could find nearby smoke, indicating an inhabitant village. But they found nothing. So they went back to their initial arrival settlement, now known as Santo Largo in Savaneta. The next morning they hiked along the Spaans Lagoen near the Mangel Halto Beach and reached the area of Bushiri. There, they boarded their kayaks and heading to what we know now as Malmok, where they found rocks of salt. After a couple days of exploring the island and gathering some salt rocks, they left for Venezuela, where they were reunited with their families.

Throughout the year, they travelled back and forth to Aruba, collecting salt. After a while they settled on the island, generations of families living along the coast. Corobori was the first indigenous inhabitant in our history to explore the entirety of the island.

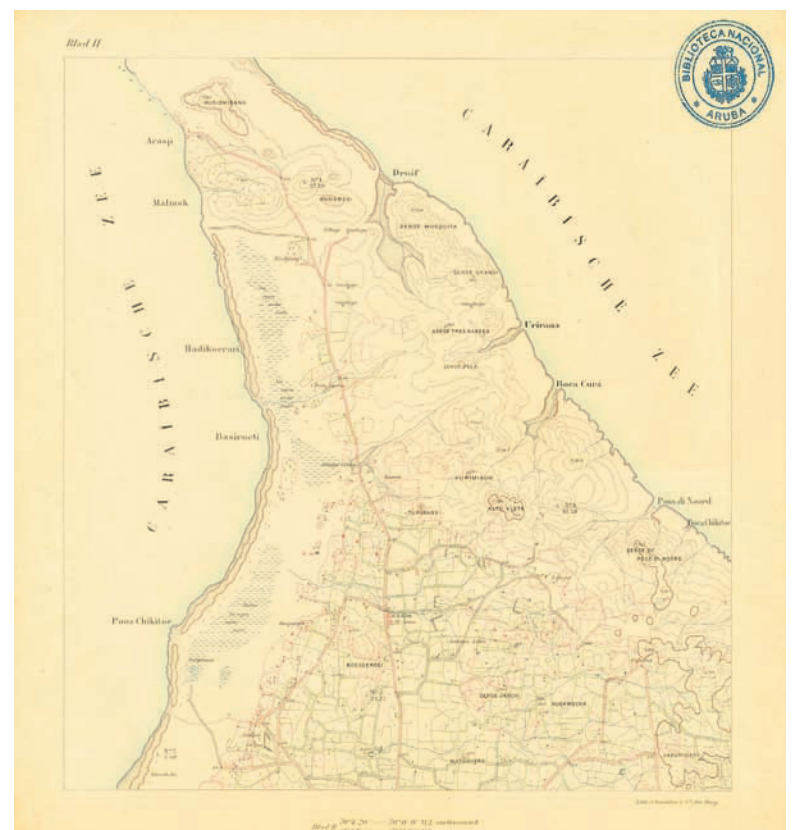
Arua, after decades as the leader of his tribe, spent his last days on the island. Having reached 80 years old, he called for his family on his death bed. In his hammock, he said: "My children, many years have passed, and I've asked my warrior to bring me back to the island so I can laid to rest. The God of living has given me the gift of life to see my son, grandchildren and great grandchildren. But now he is calling me home. Corobori, my torch is now passed to you. Guide our people, and be the leader you were always meant to become. If one day you leave my island, do not forget that it is also yours. This is my last wish: When I die, bury me in our maize plantation."

And so when the Cacique passed away, his wishes were granted and he was laid to rest in the area we now know as the Paradera Cemetery. Where he used to live, they built the Paradera Church.

And that is the tale of what inspired the Aruba name. In the generations that lived or travelled back and forth to the island, there were many familiar names\*, like Guadiriki, a warrior who was there when the island got discovered and his son, whom he called Huliba; Corobori and his children, Corodori, Camacuri and Turibana, Masiduri; and Malmok, the 13-year-old boy who alerted the Cacique when the Caribes attacked.

Familiar names: all these names are familiar to Arubans, as these are the names of places and plants on the island.

**Source: Un storia di e Indjan Arua (A story of the Indian Arua) by Adolf (Dufi) Kock**





**CROSSWORD**

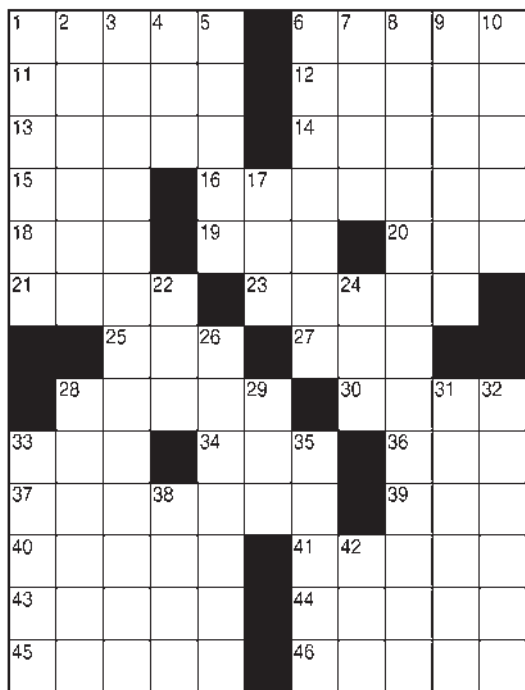
By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 39 Fleet letters
  - 1 Sees socially
  - 6 Light bender
  - 11 Pastoral poem
  - 12 Christina of "Monster"
  - 13 City of northern Italy
  - 14 Patriot Allen
  - 15 Links org.
  - 16 Old Vic, e.g.
  - 18 German article
  - 19 Frodo's friend
  - 20 That lady
  - 21 Parent's warning
  - 23 Fixes, in a way
  - 25 Unusual
  - 27 Binary base
  - 28 German steel city
  - 30 Jacob's twin
  - 33 Lingerie buy
  - 34 Young bear
  - 36 Pharaoh's symbol
  - 37 Try to equal
- DOWN**
- 1 Dropped down
  - 2 Slow movement
  - 3 Huge Cretaceous creature
  - 4 Avenue tree
  - 5 Louver parts
  - 6 Forestall
  - 7 Poet Dove
  - 8 Marine Mesozoic creature
  - 9 Alarms
  - 10 One with a pick
  - 17 Holds scores
  - 22 Six-pt.
  - 24 Really impress
  - 26 Century sections
  - 28 Kingly fur
  - 29 Bolt connector
  - 31 Concur
  - 32 Un-expected wins
  - 33 Suit
  - 35 Crab's place
  - 38 For fear that
  - 42 Sticky stuff



**Yesterday's answer**

- 7 Poet Dove
- 8 Marine Mesozoic creature
- 9 Alarms
- 10 One with a pick
- 17 Holds scores
- 22 Six-pt.
- 24 Really impress
- 26 Century sections
- 28 Kingly fur
- 29 Bolt connector
- 31 Concur
- 32 Un-expected wins
- 33 Suit
- 35 Crab's place
- 38 For fear that
- 42 Sticky stuff



1-12

AXYDLBAAXR  
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-12

**CRYPTOQUOTE**

B W Z V Z Y Z V P Q E R Y A Z W

R D T A W A Z S G I G G L , Z L U H E E X

Z W Y A Z W N Z L I G . — R Z Q B A Z

C G W Q D G B M G

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: MATURITY IS A SERIES OF SHATTERED ILLUSIONS. — LEVAR BURTON

**New funds will make investing in bitcoin easier. Here's what you need to know**



An advertisement for the cryptocurrency Bitcoin displayed on a tram, May 12, 2021, in Hong Kong.

Associated Press

By KEN SWEET  
AP Business Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Nearly a dozen new bitcoin funds began trading in U.S. markets for the first time Thursday, providing increased access to the cryptocurrency for everyday investors. The new exchange-traded funds, or ETFs, give investors an asset that closely tracks the price of bitcoin. The Securities and Exchange Commission approved 11 funds from asset managers such as Blackrock, Invesco and Fidelity late Wednesday. The wave of approvals may work in your favor as fund managers seek to attract investors by competing on fees. Besides being a win for the fund managers, the approvals are also a win for the cryptocurrency industry, which has needed a victory after nearly two years of turmoil, including the failure of several crypto firms, most notably FTX in November 2022.

The SEC's approval, however, was lukewarm at best. Gary Gensler, the agency's chairman, has repeatedly said cryptocurrencies need more regulation and invest-

for protections.

"Investors should remain cautious about the myriad risks associated with bitcoin and products whose value is tied to crypto," Gensler said. The regulatory greenlight had been anticipated for several months, however, and the price of bitcoin has jumped about 70% since October on the belief that bitcoin ETFs will drive up demand for the cryptocurrency. Bitcoin rose 2% in early trading Thursday, and trading in the new ETFs was mixed. Some analysts think that ETFs may help stabilize crypto prices by broadening their use and potential audience. But many remain concerned that crypto ETFs will place too much risk and volatility into Americans' retirement accounts.

"The notorious price volatility of bitcoin, as well as its fluctuating values against stablecoins and other cryptocurrencies, could expose mainstream investors to a less familiar spectrum of investment risks," said Yiannis Giokas, senior director of Moody's Analytics. Here are some things to know about bitcoin ETFs.

**WHY ALL THE EXCITEMENT OVER A BITCOIN ETF?**

An exchange traded fund, or ETF, is an easy way to invest in something or a group of things, like gold or junk bonds, without having to take possession of those assets. Unlike traditional mutual funds, ETFs trade like stocks, which means they can be bought and sold throughout the day. Since the inception of bitcoin, anyone wanting to own one would have to buy it. That in turn would mean either having to learn what a cold wallet is or having to open an account at a crypto trading platform like Coinbase or Binance.

A spot bitcoin ETF could open the door to many new investors who don't want to take such extra steps. The price of bitcoin has already soared in anticipation of the SEC's approval, with bitcoin trading at \$47,500 Thursday, up from around \$27,000 in mid-October. The price had sunk as low as \$16,000 in November of 2022 following the implosion of the crypto exchange FTX.

**HOW WOULD THE ETF WORK?**

New bitcoin ETFs will perform like the SPDR Gold Shares ETF (GLD), which allows anyone to invest in gold without having to find someplace to store a bar or having to protect it. It's the same reason some people invest in the SPDR Bloomberg High Yield Bond ETF (JNK), which lets investors simply buy one thing instead of the more than 1,000 low-quality bonds that make up the index.

The Bitcoin Strategy ETF (BITO) has been in existence since 2021, but it holds futures related to bitcoin, not the cryptocurrency itself. Those prices do not track as closely as a straight-up bitcoin ETF.

**HOW MANY BITCOIN ETFS COULD THERE BE?**

The SEC said it gave approval to 11 ETFs, but more are certain to apply for trading in the coming months. □

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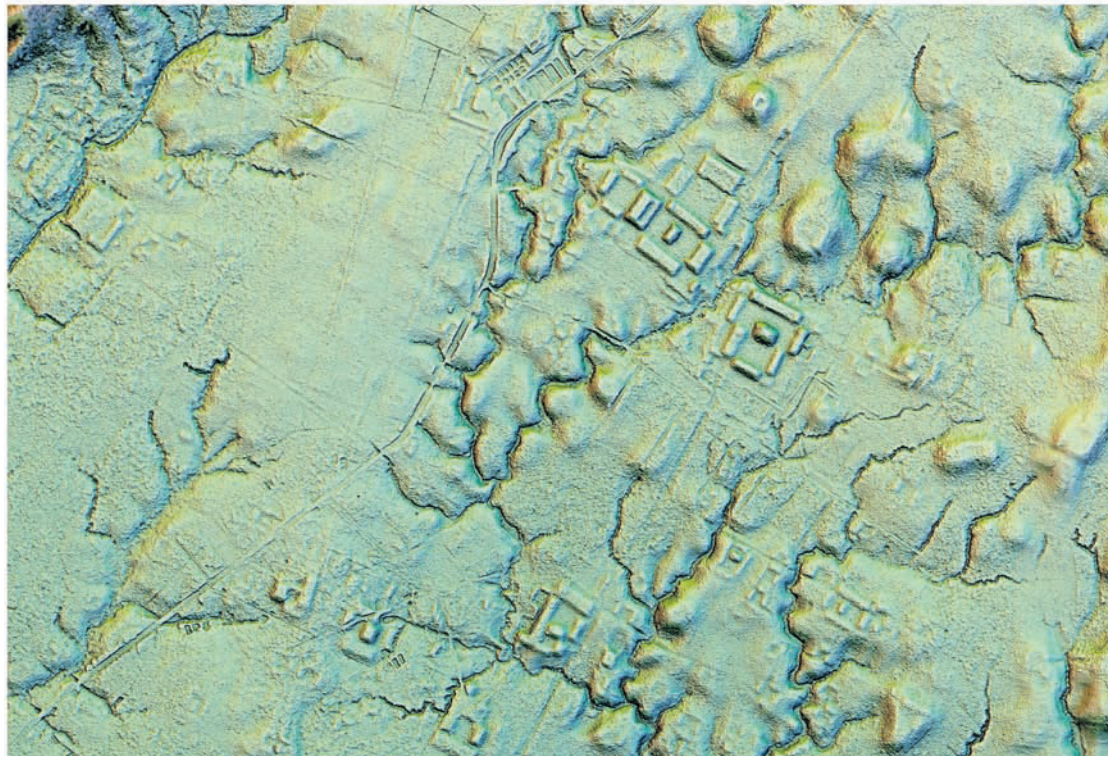
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# Archeologists map lost cities in Ecuadorian Amazon, settlements that lasted 1,000 years

By **CHRISTINA LARSON**  
**AP Science Writer**  
**WASHINGTON (AP)** — Archeologists have uncovered a cluster of lost cities in the Amazon rainforest that was home to at least 10,000 farmers around 2,000 years ago. A series of earthen mounds and buried roads in Ecuador was first noticed more than two decades ago by archaeologist Stéphen Rostain. But at the time, "I wasn't sure how it all fit together," said Rostain, one of the researchers who reported on the finding Thursday in the journal *Science*. Recent mapping by laser-sensor technology revealed those sites to be part of a dense network of settlements and connecting roadways, tucked into the forested foothills of the Andes, that lasted about 1,000 years.

"It was a lost valley of cities," said Rostain, who directs investigations at France's National Center for Scientific Research. "It's incredible." The settlements were occupied by the Upano people between around 500 B.C. and 300 to 600 A.D. a period roughly contemporaneous with the Roman Empire in Europe, the researchers found. Residential and ceremonial buildings erected on more than 6,000 earthen mounds were surrounded by agricultural fields with drainage canals. The largest roads were 33 feet (10 meters) wide and stretched for 6 to 12 miles (10 to 20 kilometers). While it's difficult to estimate populations, the site was home to at least 10,000 inhabitants and perhaps as many as 15,000 or 30,000 at its peak, said archaeologist Antoine Dorison, a study co-author at the same French institute. That's comparable to the estimated population of Roman-era London, then Britain's largest city. "This shows a very dense occupation and an extremely complicated society," said University of Florida archeologist Michael



This LIDAR image provided by researchers in January 2024 shows a main street crossing an urban area, creating an axis along which complexes of rectangular platforms are arranged around low squares at the Copueno site, Upano Valley in Ecuador.

Heckenberger, who was not involved in the study. "For the region, it's really in a class of its own in terms of how early it is." José Iriarte, a University of Exeter archaeologist, said it would have required an elaborate system of organized labor to build the roads and thousands of earthen mounds. "The Incas and Mayans built with stone, but people in Amazonia didn't usually have stone available to build they built with mud. It's still an immense amount of labor," said Iriarte, who

had no role in the research. The Amazon is often thought of as a "pristine wilderness with only small groups of people. But recent discoveries have shown us how much more complex the past really is," he said. Scientists have recently also found evidence of intricate rainforest societies that predated European contact elsewhere in the Amazon, including in Bolivia and in Brazil. "There's always been an incredible diversity of people and settlements in the Amazon, not only one

way to live," said Rostain. "We're just learning more about them." □

Associated Press

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## New list scores TV, streaming series for on-screen and behind-the-scenes diversity and inclusion

By DEEPTI HAJELA  
Associated Press

**NEW YORK (AP)** — The hundreds of television series on U.S. broadcast, cable and streaming platforms, and the executive producers creating them, are the subject of a new list one that scores them for the diversity and inclusion of the people working both on screen and behind the scenes.

The Inclusion List for episodic programming, being released Thursday by the University of Southern California's Annenberg Inclusion Initiative and the Adobe Foundation, ranks the 100 highest-scoring broadcast and cable series that aired in the 2021-2022 television season and the 100 top streaming platform series between 2021 and 2023, as well as listing the executive producers who scored the highest across all their shows in that time period.

It's a way to celebrate those producers and shows that are making the efforts to make the television industry more welcoming as well as highlight that much work still needs to be done, said Stacy L. Smith, founder of the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, which has also released reports about inclusion in the film industry.



This combination of photos shows Greg Berlanti at the 33rd annual Producers Guild Awards in Los Angeles on March 19, 2022, left, and director Ava DuVernay at the photo call for the film "Origin" during the 80th edition of the Venice Film Festival in Venice, Italy, on Sept. 6, 2023.

Associated Press

"It's important to say, here are the shows, because it tells the rest of the world, there's no excuses. It can be done," Smith told The Associated Press.

The top scorers for broadcast and cable series included shows "Queen Sugar," about a set of Black siblings in Louisiana, and "The Baby," about a

woman who doesn't have children who ends up with a mysterious baby. Streaming platform top performers included offerings like "Raising Dion," about a Black mother and son, and "Gentified," about Mexican American cousins.

Those included on the producer list included Greg Berlanti, Sarah Schechter,

Ava DuVernay, Reese Witherspoon, Mindy Kaling, and Charles King.

To compile the rankings, the Inclusion Initiative came up with a scoring system. On screen, the series regular cast were scored for representation of gender, race and ethnicity, age, disability and LGBTQ+. Behind the scenes, 10 po-

sitions including director, writer, producer, casting director and costume director were scored for gender, and race and ethnicity. The total highest possible score was 15. "Queen Sugar," for example, had a score of 12.8 and "Raising Dion" had a score of 13.3.

A number of shows that ranked on the list are no longer on air, but that's not the point of the effort, Smith said, pointing out that a show's reception by an audience can be attributed to many other factors like marketing and time slot, etc. The point is looking at who's getting to be part of the industry, getting to add to their resumes and make their connections and have an impact on what does get made for audiences to see.

"This is the start of career sustainability," Smith said, adding. "People worked. They got paid. Now they can do it again."

Alan Luna, a casting director based in Los Angeles, has seen that in action, like when an actor gets a series regular role on a show, even one that only lasts a season. It lends a credibility when trying out for following roles, he said. □

## ESPN's early season baseball schedule will be the Sho Show, featuring Shohei Ohtani and Dodgers

**BRISTOL, Conn. (AP)** — ESPN's early season baseball schedule will be the Sho Show. Shohei Ohtani and the Los Angeles Dodgers will be featured on two of ESPN's first three "Sunday Night Baseball" telecasts this season. The Dodgers' opening two games of the season were assigned to ESPN as an MLB special event, a two-game series against the Padres at Seoul, South Korea, on March 20 and 21. ESPN will open its Sunday night schedule with the Dodgers' home game

against the St. Louis Cardinals on March 31 and will televise the Dodgers' home game against the San Diego Padres on April 14, the network said Wednesday. ESPN also selected the Dodgers' June 9 game for its Sunday schedule of games, which start shortly after 7 p.m. EDT. Ohtani left the Los Angeles Angels last month to sign a record \$700 million, 10-year contract with the Dodgers. The two-way star is expected to be a regular designated hitter

but won't pitch following elbow ligament surgery.

Other Sunday night picks include World Series champion Texas hosting Houston on April 7 in a rematch of last year's AL Championship Series, the Rangers at Atlanta on April 21, the Chicago Cubs at Boston on April 28 and the Cubs at St. Louis on May 26. MLB previously announced ESPN will televise the Little League Classic game involving the Yankees and Detroit on Aug. 18 at Williamsport, Pennsylvania. □



Los Angeles Dodgers' Shohei Ohtani, center, poses for a photo with owner and chairman Mark Walter, left, and president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman applaud during a news conference at Dodger Stadium Thursday, Dec. 14, 2023, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press



## Parity, the portal and NIL all driving a new era for college basketball and how teams are ranked

By JOHN MARSHALL  
AP Basketball Writer

The 2023 NCAA Tournament was unlike any other, a parade of firsts winding down the road to Houston. None of the No. 1 seeds made it to the Elite Eight for the first time since seeding began in 1979. Not a single top-three team reached the Final Four for the first time ever; instead, the semifinals welcomed three debutant teams for first time since 1970. "I just think there's more parity than there's ever been," San Diego State coach Brian Dutcher said of a Final Four that included his Aztecs, Florida Atlantic, Miami and UConn.

College basketball is undergoing a shift, a new era ushered in by the transfer portal, endorsement money for athletes and conference realignment. Bluebloods like Kansas, Duke and North Carolina have all won championships the past eight years. But so have programs like Baylor and Virginia, while UConn and Villanova have become mini dynasties, combining for five championships since 2011. The NCAA Tournament



The Florida Atlantic bench reacts during the second half of an NCAA college basketball game against the St. Bonaventure in the Basketball Hall of Fame Classic, Saturday, Dec. 16, 2023, in Springfield, Mass.

has ramped up the madness even more, with No. 16 seeds taking out No. 1 seeds twice in the past six years after going a combined 0-135 before that. This new era is clear to see with a glance at The Associated Press Top 25 men's college basketball poll, which marks its 75th anniversary this month.

Buffalo, Furman, Wofford and FAU have been ranked for the first time in the past five years. Rutgers was ranked for the first time in 39 years, reaching No. 24 in 2019-20. Penn State ended a 24-year poll-less streak in 2019-20. College of Charleston was ranked last season for the first time since 2002-03. Then there's

Loyola-Chicago.

The Ramblers had to go back to 1984-85 for their last ranking before returning at No. 22 on Feb. 8, 2021. That came three years after a memorable run with Sister Jean to the Final Four. New teams also have emerged atop the poll. Purdue hit No. 1 for the first time in 2021 and is on a

three-season run at the top, including the current AP Top 25. Houston reached No. 1 last season for the first time since the Phi Slama Jama team in 1982-83. Alabama had its first No. 1 ranking in 10 years last season. Auburn was No. 1 for the first time the year before. Same for Baylor in 2020 while Virginia reached the top rung in 2018 for the first time in 36 years.

"What makes college basketball so unique is you can have a Florida Atlantic or a Gonzaga somebody who doesn't have big-time football be really good at basketball and have a chance to win a national championship," said National Association of Basketball Coaches executive director Craig Robinson, a former head coach at Oregon State and Brown. "That's what makes it such an appealing product, in my opinion." The transfer portal has played a part. The high-major programs have used the portal to land talented players from smaller schools, but the portal also flows back with players going to mid-majors to get more playing time. □

Associated Press

## Rory McIlroy opens 2024 with bogey-free 62 to lead Dubai Invitational by 2 shots



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland tees off on the 11th hole during the first round of Dubai Invitational golf tournament, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2024.

Associated Press

**DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP)** — Rory McIlroy is playing the Dubai Invitational as a favor to a friend and to get in some early-year practice in pleasant weather conditions. The way he has started, McIlroy might end up taking home the trophy.

The No. 2-ranked Northern Irishman marked his first competitive round of 2024 by making nine birdies in a bogey-free, 9-under 62 to take a two-shot lead after the first round of the European tour event on Thursday.

"Surprised myself a little bit," McIlroy said, "but hopefully more of the same over the next few days."

Yannik Paul (64) was alone in second place at Dubai Creek Resort, with Thriston Lawrence (65) a further stroke back and Tommy Fleetwood and Thorbjorn Olesen tied for fourth place after 66s.

McIlroy sees the Dubai Invitational a tournament in a relaxed setting, with no cut and a 60-man field as a gentle way to ease into 2024. He certainly looked at home back in Dubai, where he once lived and a place he often visits early in the year to fine-tune his game.

In the team part of the event, he partnered Abdullah Al Naboodah, a non-executive director at the European tour who helped set up the Dubai Invitational and is someone McIlroy counts as a good friend.

Starting at No. 10, McIlroy made six birdies in eight holes around the turn during a spell where he made six straight 3s. □



# Patriots parting with coach Bill Belichick, who led team to 6 Super Bowl championships

By **KYLE HIGHTOWER**

AP Sports Writer

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (AP)

— Bill Belichick had a vision of building the kind of sustained, championship football team that had rarely been seen before in the NFL when he was hired by the New England Patriots. He walks away feeling like it was a job well done.

The six-time NFL champion agreed to part ways as the coach of the Patriots, ending his 24-year tenure as the architect of the most decorated dynasty of the league's Super Bowl era.

"It's with so many fond memories and thoughts that I think about the Patriots," Belichick said on Thursday in a media availability with owner Robert Kraft. "I'll always be a Patriot. I look forward to coming back here. But at this time, we're going to move on. And I look forward, excited for the future."

Neither Belichick nor Kraft took questions, though Kraft scheduled an availability for later in the day.

Speaking to reporters from the podium where he had given so many terse, non-responsive postgame recaps, Belichick appeared in a jacket and tie and spoke first, followed by Kraft. The coach even smiled a couple of times including when he conceded respect for the media "even though we don't always see eye to eye."

He also thanked the fans for "the sendoffs, the parades, the Sundays." But most of his time was spent thanking the people throughout the organization, especially the more than 1,000 Patriots players he coached in his time here. "Players win games in the NFL," Belichick said. "I've been very, very fortunate to coach some of the greatest players to ever play the game." Kraft called the relationship a marriage that had required work and had come to an end.

"I'm very proud that our partnership lasted for 24



**New England Patriots team owner Robert Kraft, left, and former Patriots head coach Bill Belichick embrace during an NFL football news conference, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2024, in Foxborough, Mass., to announce that Belichick, a six-time NFL champion, has agreed to part ways with the team.**

Associated Press

years," Kraft said. "Bill has taught me a lot over those years, and we had high expectations for what we could achieve together. I think we were the only ones who had those expectations, and I think it's safe to say we exceeded them."

"We did," Belichick agreed. "Thanks to you," Kraft said. Belichick, 71, became just the third coach in NFL history to reach 300 career regular-season victories earlier this season, joining Hall of Famers Don Shula and George Halas. With 333 wins including the playoffs, Belichick trails only Shula (347) for the record for victories by a coach.

But the Patriots ended this season 4-13, Belichick's worst record in 29 seasons as an NFL head coach. It supplanted the 5-11 mark he managed in his last year in Cleveland in 1995 and again in his first year in New England in 2000. Including the playoffs, he ends his Patriots tenure with a 333-178 overall record.

Belichick is expected to resume his pursuit of Shula's record elsewhere.

With his cutoff hoodies and ever-present scowl, Belichick teamed with quarterback Tom Brady to lead

the Patriots to six Super Bowl victories, nine AFC titles and 17 division championships in 19 years. During a less successful but also tumultuous stint with the original Cleveland Browns, Belichick earned 37 of his career victories.

Reaction to Thursday's announcement poured in across social media. It included one from Brady, who responded with three heart emojis to a post on ESPN's Instagram page which had photos of Belichick and Kraft embracing during Thursday's news conference.

It's not immediately clear who Kraft will tap to replace the future Hall of Famer.

Patriots linebackers coach Jerod Mayo won a Super Bowl ring playing under Belichick and has interviewed for multiple head coaching vacancies since becoming a New England assistant in 2019. Mayo turned down a few interviews last offseason before signing a contract extension to remain with the Patriots. Mike Vrabel, who was fired earlier this week by the Tennessee Titans and won three Super Bowls with the Patriots, is also expected to be a candidate for the

head coaching job.

Belichick had been grooming offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels to replace him before McDaniels left following the 2021 season to become the coach of the Raiders. He has since been fired by Las Vegas. Belichick's two sons, Steve and Brian, are also on the coaching staff.

Belichick's exit from the Patriots comes just a day after another coaching great and longtime friend Nick Saban announced he'd retire after winning seven college national championships. Saban worked for Belichick's father, Steve, in the 1980s as a coach at Navy, and Bill Belichick hired Saban as his defensive coordinator when he became Cleveland's head coach in 1991.

The six Super Bowl wins tie Belichick with pre-merger mentors Halas and Curly Lambeau for the most NFL championships. Belichick also won two rings as Bill Parcells' defensive coordinator with the New York Giants. But the Patriots have stumbled to a 29-38 record since Brady departed following the 2019 season and missed the playoffs in three of those four seasons. Be-

ginning in 2001 when Brady became the starting quarterback, the Patriots missed the playoffs only once when Brady was injured in 2008. This marked New England's fifth consecutive season without a playoff victory.

Belichick's subsequent solutions at quarterback haven't panned out.

Brady's initial replacement, Cam Newton, didn't resemble the player who won the 2015 MVP award and was cut after a 7-9 finish in 2020. Meanwhile, Brady won his seventh Super Bowl ring with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers that same season.

Potential long-term replacement Mac Jones, a 2021 first-round draft choice, was a Pro Bowl selection as a rookie and led New England to the playoffs. But he regressed in Year 2 when Belichick put longtime defensive assistant Matt Patricia in charge of the offense. Jones didn't fare much better this season when Bill O'Brien returned as offensive coordinator. He was benched four times before being replaced as starter by backup Bailey Zappe for the final six games.

That left the Patriots looking at a lengthy rebuild, with no candidate on the roster to bring stability to the sport's most important position.

Belichick, who also served as the de facto general manager with final say on personnel decisions, was celebrated for his ingenuity managing the salary cap during the run of Super Bowl success. It included getting stars like Brady and others to accept cap-friendly contracts or adjust their deals to accommodate the signing of other players. But that acclaim has waned in the years since Brady left, as a run of draft picks and high-priced free agents didn't live up to expectations. In addition, Belichick has seen several members of his personnel and scouting departments leave for other jobs. □